1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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159 him and left him for Cairo, whereupon Mahmoud followed him to effect a reconciliation and the brother was persuaded to return.

A year ago he helped his cousin, who is not strong enough for farming, to open a small shop. The income from the shop as well as from farming is pooled by all the family, Mahmoud being the one who looks after the needs and requirements of all his brothers and their wives.

[755] Mahmoud is a great believer in the evil eye, and it was his practice to warn the writer against certain people by asking him to recite a 'Sura' from the Koran on passing them. He told the writer that he usually spreads on parts of his farm a handful of sand from the tomb of Saint Abu-Naggi, who lies buried on high ground, to ward off the evil eye. In this connection he related the following incident: once, a person well known for his evil eye deliberately passed by Mahmoud's farm and admired it. The same man later passed by his farm and admired his cow, which after that day gave blood instead of milk. As Mahmoud could no longer tolerate the envier, he seized upon the occasion of a funeral in the clan's guest house to which the envier belonged, and went to complain about him, holding a white flag and asking his clan to stop their kinsman from casting his evil eye on his land and animals.

Mahmoud is strong and healthy and takes special pride in the fact that the malaria epidemic did not touch him. He interprets this as evidence that his social intentions and dealing are genuinely good. And because of his health during the epidemic period, he used to visit and assist the sick, and since there were very few who could attend to the burial ceremony and prayers, he made a point of not missing any if he could manage it as attendance is a pious deed and God rewards it. He is also grateful to God

●[731] that he and his brothers managed to save their bread from the torrent that destroyed most of the village harvest in 1948. They all waded into the water, spending a whole night and morning in gathering their floating stacks of corn and removing them to the dry land.

In assessing Mahmoud's personality and position in the village, one must point out the structurally precarious composition of Mahmoud's family, consisting of half-brothers and a cousin. Yet his personality, together with the close relationship between the brothers' wives, has assured the unity of the family. This might also be due in part to the fact that none of the brothers has a grown-up boy, a factor that might tempt the father to work independently.

Mahmoud combines a conservative and unimaginative nature with extraversion and a great deal of self-confidence. Although he has been to town on frequent visits and occupied an official post, he has not altered his dress or accent in favour of town ways. His 'zabout', the outer garment, still has the long and wide sleeves that stretch at least three inches past the hand, his turban is a large one, and he is fond of carrying his thick stave on moving about in the village.

Mahmoud is a satisfactory example of the older generation of the village,

exception. The fellaheen as a whole use no machinery at all. This is probably due less to habit or ignorance than to an instinct for self-preservation. If machinery is not more commonly used in Egyptian farming, the reason is that the owners find man-power more economical. For the moment the two points of view coincide. But it will not always be so. One day the fellaheen will increase their demands, and machines will become more profitable to the landowners. Manual labour should keep its leading place, however, for to mechanise labour in the Nile Valley would be to destroy the organic relationship which has grown up between the cultivators and their soil, and overthrow a balance now preserved by methods of labour appropriate to an abundant population.

2. Conditions of Work

To this soil the fellah devotes all his energies. He gives himself to it without reserve, even passionately when it is his own. But that is very rare. Here man belongs to the land, not the land to him. This is the true cause of both his lethargy and his poverty. None of the conditions under which he may labour make for freedom. Let us look in turn at each of the varying conditions which obtain today.

The Fellah as Forced Labourer

The *corvée* was suppressed in 1893, but continues to be legally applied in certain cases of public necessity. Then the fellah is mobilised by authority, torn from his field and his village, and sent to the spot where his services are needed.

It may be that the Nile flood threatens catastrophe. On such occasions hundreds of thousands of fellaheen are set to work day and night under the rod of officials and overseers to raise the embankments, build dykes, deal with any escape and watch the barrages.

Suppose a dyke is on the point of breaking. The fellaheen rush in a compact mass to the point of danger, each with his *fass* and basket. They heighten the dyke and buttress it with a great rampart composed of earth, rushes, palm-trunks, and — if need be — maize-stalks and sugar-cane.

In 1934 they saved the country by such efforts. The Government set aside L.E. 150,000 to fight the danger;

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it was used to buy materials and to pay travelling expenses and bonuses for officials. The fellaheen got no wages for their pains, no compensation for their enforced absence from the fields.

By law every Egyptian is liable to be enlisted in the fight against the flood danger. In fact, none but the fellaheen are ever called upon. However, according to the Speech from the Throne of May 1936, "No-one shall be employed henceforward on the embankments of the Nile or of the basins during the flood period without receiving appropriate payment [26]".

But there are other dangers which may threaten the prosperity of the country, cotton disease, for instance. To get rid of this pest a swarm of men, women and children must bend over the cotton plants from six o'clock till midday and from two o'clock till six, and search them row by row, plant by plant, leaf by leaf. Each infected leaf must be delicately nipped off and put into the lap of the *gallabiya*. If a single diseased leaf escapes notice the overseer just behind will see it and bring his stick down at once on the back of the culprit.

"I went up to one of these poor wretches toiling under the lash in the heat of the sun and asked him how much he got per day for his trouble: 2 piastres [26]".

In June 1936, for example, by virtue of the law of 1910, [27] a million young fellaheen were mobilised to save 435,785 feddans attacked by the pink worm [28], which devours the cotton bolls; it reproduces itself five times in a year. The Royal Agricultural Society is offering L.E. 20,000 to anyone who can find a remedy for this new plague of Egypt. Such a discovery would put an end to at least one sort of forced labour.

There is a third sort of emergency. About once every five years, the last time being in 1931 (the 1937 invasion was stopped in the desert), Egypt is attacked by vast swarms of locusts, which would destroy all the crops unless another host went out to meet them. Entire villages are transported to the worst affected areas (under the decree of 16th June 1891) to drive the swarms back to the desert or towards the sea. The method used consists in digging long trenches, keeping up smoke screens, shrieking, and flapping branches,

to prevent the locusts from settling and to hasten their departure. 466 731

A fourth case remains to be noted. It is usual, though not obligatory, for a fellah who wishes to keep in his omda's good books to work for him several days without pay. 651

The Fellah as Day Labourer

Day labourers are recruited *en masse* by a *rayess* or foreman to dig a canal, mend a road, or gather in a crop. Each man brings his own *fass*, and the whole gang carries out the required task under strict surveillance, like a gang of prisoners and often far from home. This drafting of men hired by a *rayess* into a locality where hands are short is called *tarhila*. For a twelve-hour day with a brief midday rest the pay is two or three piastres. A big landowner tells me that on his estate the fellaheen are usually paid three piastres a day, for either ploughing or working on cotton [29]. The *tarhila* is chiefly applied in Upper Egypt, where cotton is cultivated less, but labourers are more easily obtained and large estates are more common. It is also applied on State Domains which are under direct cultivation. 464 466 [465]

When day labourers are not attached to the estate they are subject to unemployment and want, except at times when big works make their help necessary. The more fortunate are engaged by the year, somewhat like the *obbligati* of Italy. Such men receive regular payment, partly in kind and partly in cash. For example, an owner lets a feddan to a fellah on credit. The wages for days spent at work for the owner are deducted from the rent payable. At the end of the year the fellah has a debit or credit according to the total of days he has worked. In other cases the fellah is paid only one piastre a day, but gets in addition the crop of maize from one feddan. 464

The temptation here is to work as little as possible. But it must be noted that owing to the abundance of hands the day labourer's wage remains extremely low. The changes due to the war have not increased it, and 5 piastres is a maximum rarely attained, whether for fellaheen, transport workers or small craftsmen [30]. Such wages are insufficient to support a fellah and his family, but a certain compensation is found in the traditional extras — the women's gleanings, 461 465

part *berseem*, and part wheat for the winter. The *berseem* is consumed by his cattle, the wheat produces 2½ *ardebs*, selling at about L.E. 6, but the landowner keeps back L.E. 4 of this as the second instalment of rent.

The tenant then plants his maize for the *nili* crop on his two feddans, but before the harvest he must pay the balance of his rent (L.E. 2) to the owner, and can then take the maize for himself. In fact it is only the yield of this last crop which really belongs to the fellah and his family. After setting aside enough to feed his family, he sells what is left. If all goes well he may be about L.E. 6 to the good.

But all may not go well. If the crop has been poor, or there was a blight, or the crop has been badly sold, the tenant must still pay the full rent, as provided in Article 392 of the Egyptian Civil Code. Ruin is the result. Sometimes (e.g. in the three years from 1929 to 1932) catastrophe has been so general that the Government has had to issue decrees for the reduction of rent in a proportion of 25% to 40% according to the date of contract. The State cannot always intervene, and owing to the keen demand land is rarely let except at high rents. The consequences for the fellah are frequently disastrous.

One unhappy tenant farmer, whose *gamoossa* had just been seized, explained the situation to an inquirer in these words:

"I hired two feddans at L.E. 12 apiece. On each I spent L.E. 5 in seeds, manures and so on, not to mention my labour, that of my children, and the help of my animals throughout the year. What is the result? One feddan yielded four *cantars* of cotton, which sold at L.E. 12. The other produced five *ardebs* of corn and seven of maize, which brought me L.E. 13. Out of this L.E. 25 I had already spent L.E. 10, so how could I pay my rent of L.E. 24? I had to sell the *gamoossa*."

"But if you only lose, why continue to rent land?"

"Because farming is the job I learnt from my fathers, and I don't know how to do anything else."

"But why rent land at such a high price?"

"Because the local landowners have conspired to keep the prices up, and the fellaheen do not know how to get them lowered."

that creeps up from the soil from undermining the building. The walls have few apertures, partly, again, to ensure stability, but also to protect the interior from heat and glare by day, and against the cold and dangers of the night. The doorway, which is about six feet high and three wide, is separated from the street by a shallow threshold. One or two tiny loopholes above eye level, measuring about twelve inches by eight, are the only other openings to the outside; and even these are stuffed up in winter.

This limitation of window space is due partly to the high price of wood. Egypt, lying in the sparsely wooded zone of tropical desert which stretches from India to the Sudan, is poorly supplied with wood. The date palms, sycamores, and acacias that give shade to the villages are too precious to be cut down for beams, and would in any case be insufficient to provide all the doors and windows that proper hygiene would necessitate. The trunks of date palms are certainly used, but very sparingly, since such trees bring their owners P.T. 100 a year in fruit, branches and fibre. Imported wood (from Finland, Sweden, Rumania and the U.S.S.R.), though commonly used in the towns, is beyond the normal means of the fellah. The result is that the doorway very often contains no door, and the loopholes are almost always without either glass or woodwork.

Though wood is dispensed with as far as possible, for the roof it is essential. In Upper Egypt, where it never rains, some houses remain roofless; but this is exceptional, and as a rule the four walls are at least covered with foliage. Ill-squared beams, set two feet apart, serve as a support for the interwoven stalks of maize, cotton, or reeds, together with palm branches. To prevent this construction from rotting, it is covered with rough mats and plastered with a thick layer of mud-and-cinder. This makes a terrace, which is proof against showers and solid enough in summer to support a roof-hut and the sleeping bodies of all the members of the household. The roof can be reached from outside by a wooden ladder or brick staircase; constant access is needed to the place where tools, grain reserves, fuel, and sometimes even poultry are kept.

The necessary habit of keeping dry brushwood and straw on the roof is a frequent cause of fire, which, by reason of the closeness of the houses, soon spreads to the neighbourhood

731 and to the whole village. A spark from oven orstove in
[372 the burning heat of summer is enough to bring disaster.
488] Village fires, by their size and frequency, constitute one of the plagues of the Egyptian countryside. Between 1926 and 1930 sixty-six places were destroyed in this way, and every year, especially between April and September, the Public Security Department has appalling damage to report. To give an idea of its extent, here are four incidents of recent years:

1. January 14, 1936. Village of Mit Yaish, in the Markaz of Mit Ghamr. "The fire spread with terrifying speed, ending in the destruction of 94 houses. Hundreds of fellaheen are homeless."

2. April 22, 1936. El Muassaga, in the Markaz of Hehia. "The fire spread to 43 houses, which were reduced to ashes, with all the cattle, poultry and foodstuffs they contained. Losses were estimated at L.E. 300. The enquiry has proved that the fire was started by a woman of the village, named Nefissa Hassan, who was cooking in her home. A few sparks fell on the brushwood on the roof, and with the help of the wind the fire quickly spread."

3. May 5, 1937. "A terrible fire broke out in Bakanîsh, in Dessûq Markaz in the Mudiriya of Gharbiya. Five hundred houses were completely destroyed; 14 people were burnt alive, and 13 others who were rescued are suffering from severe burns."

4. January 14, 1941. "Fire broke out in the village of Deir, in the Markaz of Toukh, destroying 217 houses, causing 20 deaths, burning crops and cattle, and leaving 400 families destitute. The cause was a woman cooking on the roof."

656 There is indeed a regulation which forbids 'the storing of
731 brushwood on the flat roofs of houses', and a "Committee for Fighting Fires in the Countryside". But no regulation or committee can stop the fellah from storing his fuel on the roof, unless he is given the means of storing it elsewhere. He is similarly advised not to sleep with his cattle, but if he left them outside they would be stolen, and inside there is so little room.

353 What use does he make of the space available? If we go inside, we shall at once notice the darkness and the smell, if not the fleas. The house consists of a single room, sixteen to twenty feet by ten or twelve. "When

594 From a fortnight after marriage until her first son is five
462 years old, the wife helps her husband in the fields, especially in the cotton season; but, unlike the Alawite peasant women for example, she never tackles heavy work.

462 More often she is busy at home; there is plenty to do,
562 for she mills and bakes, rears and milks the *gamoossa* and the
593 goat, looks after the fowls, prepares manure and fuel, sews, washes, and delouses herself in public.

She is free to come and go within the limits set by village tradition. She is not hidden from the menfolk like townswomen or the women of the middle class. She has to carry breakfast to her husband out in the fields, then return home with the *gamoossa's* dung, and fetch water several times a day. She must go to market to sell eggs, butter and poultry, and to buy oil and other things. Tradition and necessity outweigh the severity of the Koran.

The wife retains ownership of the furniture she brought on her wedding-day, and the money for what she sells. In this way she can save and even lend to her husband, which gives her a certain authority. If he maltreats her, she can go back to her father's house and impose her own conditions before returning — the gift of a dress, or a pair of ear-rings. She is less dependent on her husband than he is on her.

593 A year or two ago, when the men were being levied to
181 meet the flood danger, I heard a woman weeping. "Don't
● 731 take it so much to heart", I said. "They've taken your
231 husband off, but he'll come back."

"It isn't for my husband I'm crying, but for my lost *gamoossa*. Find me my *gamoossa*."

562 The *fellâha* retains her liberty and authority as long as
577 she is wise enough not to infringe the traditions; for then the man gets the upper hand again. She will die rather than let herself be examined or treated by a doctor. She may go out and gossip with the other women as much as she likes, but woe to her if she is found in the company of a man, or even alone in some unwonted place. If she goes wrong, her husband accuses her to her family. Then her
684 father, brother, or cousin must kill her. Such *crimes d'hon-*
577 *neur*, being commended though not established by Islam, are still frequent and are treated with indulgence by the courts. But the severity of the punishment is out of proportion not only to the crime, but also to the woman's education.

212 ideas, for the literary language in which books and newspapers are written is unfamiliar to them (71).

184 The weakness and the sufferings of the fellaheen arise from their abysmal ignorance in a fast-progressing world. The revival which has just been described only accentuates their isolation and dependence.

178 At the same time, if within the mass no substantial changes can be recorded, outside it some progress may be seen, and inside there are some signs of future evolution.

There is a certain growth in the sense of social responsibility. Progressive Egypt is beginning to pay some attention to unprogressive Egypt, clumsily it may be, by fits and starts, and as yet more in theory than in practice, but at least with the desire to help those who cannot help themselves.

641 Today the fellah has legal rights. He is no longer sub-
466 ject to forced labour at the good pleasure of his masters.
671 There is a code of law, and judges to apply it. It is true that the fellah does not always know how to make use of this, but the law exists, where formerly there was no defence.

641 'To put an end to the cruelty of the pasha, to let the
636 fellah's wife and frightened child have what belongs to them', such was the work of Lord Cromer at the end of the nineteenth century (72). This High Commissioner, who gave much thought to the fellaheen, used all his power to obtain for them at least strict justice. The lash was made illegal, and
[651 taxes were fixed at reasonable rates and periods. The fellah
681 is no longer in constant terror of the *sarraf*. He knows
731 how much he has to pay, and realises that if his field has
661] suffered from flood, drought or fire, the tax is remitted. The venality of officials and the selfishness of big landowners often nullify the benefits of these measures. But they have their effect.

In 1912 Lord Cromer's successor, Lord Kitchener, also caused a law to be passed in favour of the fellah, whereby the dwelling of the small farmer, his necessary implements, two of his cattle and five feddans were exempt from seizure. To make the fellah's finances sounder and accustom him to some kind of system the same High Commissioner established Savings Banks in the villages, where the fellah was to
[453] keep his savings. This institution, perhaps because it was